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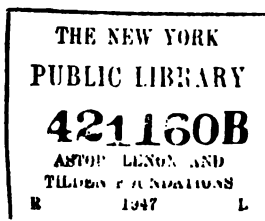


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## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER

- I STACK SPIES OUT THE LAND 1
- II STACK GETS A MOVE ON 12
- III STACK HITS THE JUNGLE 26
- IV STACK IS HUSTLED BY THE EAST 39
- V STACK GOES TO JAIL 51
- VI STACK GETS HIS DOLLAR'S WORTH 61
- VII STACK BREAKS JAIL 73
- VIII STACK MEETS THE LADY 84
- IX STACK HUSTLES THE EAST 96
- X STACK HUSTLES IT SOME MORE 108



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The Landing of Phineas Quigley Stack 2

Stack Doing the Listening 17

Mungo, for Short 23

The Docile Millions of Asia 29

The Sultan 42

"What Are You Doing Up Here?" 50

The Lucky Dollar 59

Something Doing 71

The Royal Relatives 81

Kulani 90

Outside the Taboo 102

The Sultan Comes Across 110

The Romance of Commerce 115



# BEATING 'EM TO IT

## CHAPTER I

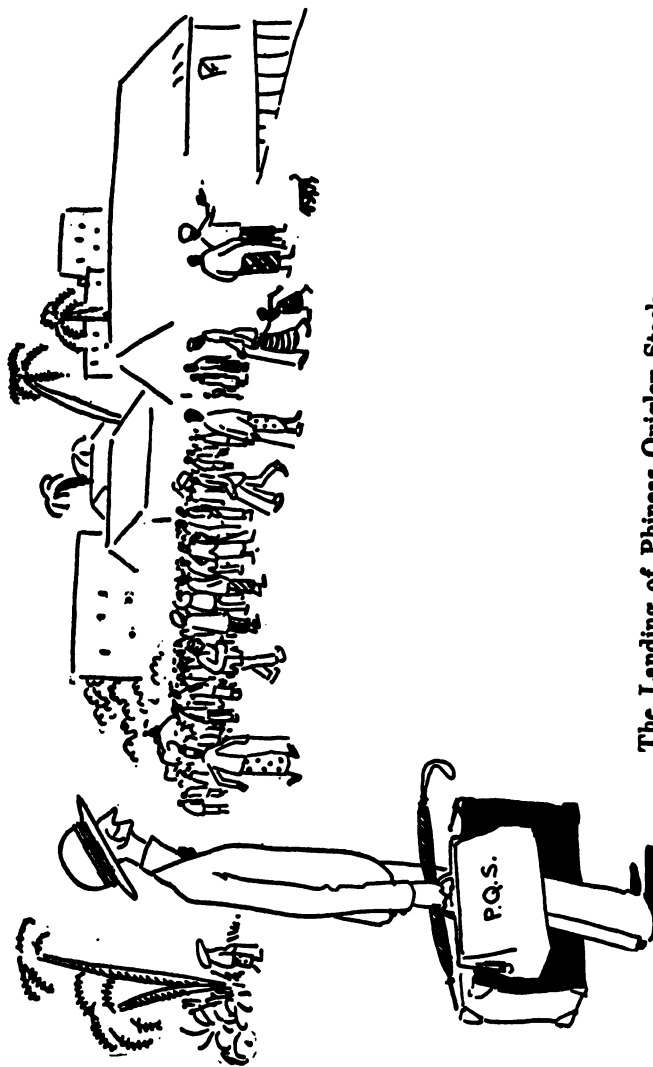
### *STACK SPIES OUT THE LAND*

**I** LANDED in the colony of Palmland to sell our Diamond Brand Vienna Sausage; but I hadn't been ten minutes ashore before I found out that the whole community—black, white, and speckled—was busy figuring on whether or not the old Sultan Ali was going to come down from his two-goat-power capital back in the bosky and clean up the town.

I talked the matter over with a Britisher who was loafing round, looking for some one to stand him a drink.

"S'elp me bob," said he, "it can't be done. They'll never let you shove your ugly mug into the Sultan's territory with your beastly sausages. Besides, it ain't sausages the Sultan's goin' to get—he's bloomin' well goin' to get a hultimatum."





The Landing of Chinese Coolies at P.A.

"You ought to have been an American," said I.

"Why?" said he.

"Because your so polite to strangers," said I.

I shot some snake antidote into him, and then went back to the hotel.

Next day I braced up to one of the colonial officials—seketary, I guess they called him. Anyhow, when I got to his office there was a tall coon standing at the door, with legs about as thick as a strand of macaroni, and a tablecloth wrapped round his head.

"S'lam," said he.

"Not at all," said I. "Have one on me this time." And I gave him a quarter.

He went into the seketary's office with my card; and by and by I heard two white men buzzing away all at the same time, like a national convention.

Just as I was beginning to think there was nothing doing for the Diamond Brand the coon came out and said: "S'lam," and some other new ones; but I didn't bite that time.

"See here, my dago friend," said I, "s'lam's all right, but it doesn't count more'n once in a morning."

And he smiled, and showed me in to the seketary's office.

"Now," said I to myself, "here's where P. Q. Stack, of Calais, Maine, gets his money's worth out of that how-to-behave-like-a-gent book that his Aunt Abbey gave him when he said good-bye to home and mommer."

The seketary was a sure enough high muck-a-muck. He was tall and scrawny and pale, and he had a nose on him like the macaw they used to sport up at Muldoon's bar in Cheyenne. Gee, but it was a big nose, all right, all right.

When the light struck it sideways the other end of his face was plunged in a sort of suburban darkness; and you couldn't tell what was going on inside his think-tank just by looking at one-half of his face. It was like holding three deuces against a man with a one-card draw—you didn't know where you were at until one of you'd had to buy some more chips.

He had a pull on me, too, because of a round piece of window-glass that he wore over one of his eyes to keep out the draught. The way he worked holding that glass up to its job was all right as a gymnastic stunt; but it was even money with me all the time whether he was enjoying my conversation, or suffering from

one of those jump-jump diseases, or just having a good time with himself.

"P. Q.," said I to myself, "you're up against a real true-blue diplomat, the kind you read about in the Sunday papers. It sticks out all over him. He'll have a little fun with you, to show there's no ill feeling; and then he'll hand you out a couple of years in the penitentiary for breaking some blamed law you never heard of."

I was scared, all right, because I'd heard Bill Wilson—you know Bill; used to be with the Late and Early Bird Packing Company; left 'em because the firm said they'd rather have Bill own the business and him pay *their* travelling expenses, than them own the business and have to pay *his* travelling expenses.

Well, Bill, as I was saying, told me how he'd been pinched in a British colony for something or other that wouldn't have feazed a kindergarten school where he came from down in Texas, and how the judge piled on an extra month because Bill wrote him a polite note offering to give him a draft for five hundred dollars on the Late and Early Bird Packing Company—travelling expenses, I guess—if the judge'd call it quits and let Bill rush the

canned-goods business, which was what he'd really come to the colony for—the trouble he'd got into being a little something on the side.

Well, I was always a pretty slick talker, and I figured it out that the best chance I had of coming out on top was to fix my mind firmly on the importance of selling Diamond Brand to the natives, and then to open my face and let her rip.

As it panned out, the seketary didn't have a look in. I was a new one on him; and before he'd got onto my curves I had natives and Diamond Brand, civilization and sausages, wholesome nourishment and Anglo-American friendship, the square deal and British fair play, and a lot of other choice ones playing tag inside that diplomatic head-piece.

"Now, it's just as clear," said I, "as the decisions of the United States Supreme Court in the Islands cases. You let me go into the interior with the sausages; and if, as I've been told by a prominent citizen here, you want a scare loaded off onto the Sultan Ali, why, I'll fix that oriental despot so's he'll want to dig a big hole in the ground, and then climb into it and lose himself."

The seketary, like a lot of Britishers I know,

had a good deal of trouble getting his buzz-plant started. But I want to say right here that there's many a home in the U. S. A. still waiting for remittances from a wandering parent through some smart Alecks thinking that because the average Britisher fixes up his conversation with a lot of noises that sound like the last pint of water running out of a bath, he's something soft that's being handed round for you to bite pieces out of.

No, Sir; I've tried it, and I know.

When the Britisher gurgles and splutters the worst, when you're beginning to get anxious as to whether the pint of water isn't too big or the hole in the bath too small, that's when the Britisher's working up to danger-point; that's when you'd oughter say your little prayer, even if you can't do better than: "Mary had a little lamb."

Well, I will say this for the sekretary—he was the most baldest-up man I'd seen in a long time. He tried to say it, whatever it was, but he couldn't get it out; so, as I was in a hurry, I told him to think it over and not take it too much to heart, and left him.

As soon as I got outside the door, up jumps the coon and says:

"S'laml"

"No!" said I, "you'll have to make out for the rest of the day on your salary."

You didn't have to be quicker'n a one-horse hearse to see that high living and no thinking was the correct thing in the gay metropolis of Palmtown.

On my way back to the hotel I passed along a fine avenue, and on one side of it there was a ten-acre lot covered with grass—the smoothest and greenest you ever saw—and a whole crowd of Britishers playing tennis and polo and a kind of game that looked like baseball gone wrong; and off in one corner there was a sort of grand stand where you could get a real damp drink for a dime.

Well, Sir, it was more fun than a goat. There was the sun hot enough to have made you think you'd been asleep and waked up in the next world, and there was the raging crowd of Britishers playing all kinds of ball; and there was the bunch of beauts up in the grand stand talking servants and babies and bridge and automobiles, according to their condition and intelligence.

Gee, but that part of it made me think of

home and the piazza of the summer hotel and little Mamie Hosmer and—oh, pshaw!

Next morning I thought I'd take a paezar round the town and see if I couldn't drop a case of beef-extract here and there among the Chinese traders. Those Chinks out there are crazy about beef-extract.

All you've got to do is to make any old mixture that looks like tar and tastes like brine, dump it into a bottle, slap a label on it with a picture like the one the Bull Durham people use, and John'll come down with the metal every time.

But, as it happened, John wasn't going to get any restored vitality out of me that morning, for, just as I was climbing into a rickshaw, up dashes a man on horseback and says:

"Are you Mr. P. Q. Stack?"

"It's I'm," said I.

Then he dug down into a leather bag he had slung over his shoulder, and handed me a letter about a foot long with

### ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

printed right across the top, and on the back a red seal as big 'round as a waffle.



"P. Q.," said I to myself, "this is where the seketary gets back at you."

But I had another guess coming.

I didn't lose any time opening that envelope. There was a big sheet of hand-made, deckle-edge paper in it, about three feet square and as stiff as a shirt-bosom. In the left-hand top corner there was a lot of display advertising in red ink with "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*" under it. It was a new brand on me, all right; but I didn't have any time to think of that, specially as I couldn't understand dago.

After looking pretty closely over the paper I found some writing on it. It was plumb in the centre and looked like something left out in the snow; and it was easy to see that the guy who wrote it wasn't paid by the word. All the letter said was:

His Excellency the Governor will be much indebted to Mr. P. Q. Stack if he will call at Government House to-day at eleven o'clock.

I couldn't read the signature, but if I'd only had one guess I should have thought it was "By the Waters of Babylon."

"Give the Governor my love," said I, "and tell him I'll be there on time," and the man on horseback galloped off.

I thought I'd better do the thing in style, so I got a carriage and a pair of horses, just to let the Governor see that the Diamond Brand had the price, and about half-past ten I started for Government House.

It was a fine place for carriage riding. Those Britishers are the real black tulip at road-making. Why, here was that one-horse village, with about the population of an East Side tenement-house, and none of 'em earning more'n a quarter a day and find themselves, and the roads made me blush for my country.

I won't do those roads the injustice of saying that they were as smooth as a billiard-table, for the billiard-tables I struck in Palmtown ought to have had contour lines marked on 'em, same as the maps of the Geological Survey. But I will say this, that, compared with them, any road I ever saw in the good old U. S. A. wasn't much better than a lot of dump-heaps strung on end.

## CHAPTER II

### *STACK GETS A MOVE ON*

**I**T was my first shy at a Governor, and I sort of expected that there were a lot of new ones coming round the corner for P. Q.; and that was where my trial-balance came out to a cent.



I got to Government House, all right; and as soon as I saw it, I said to myself: "P. Q., where does the money come from?"



It was a big white palace, something after the style of those Newport homes that our millionaires build for their help to live in, only more so; and there were two coloured gentlemen in scarlet-and-gold uniforms, standing one on each side of the stoop.

I guess they must have belonged to the same

lodge as the man with the "s'lam" that I'd met down to the seketary's office, because you couldn't hardly see their legs unless you looked at 'em sideways; and they had table-cloths round their heads to keep out the heat, only they were more fancy.

I was going to speak to one of 'em, when a white man in evening clothes came down the steps toward me.

"Brace up, P. Q.," said I to myself, "here's the Governor."

But I was away off that time; it was only the Governor's private, confidential valet, a sort of first aid to Governors.

His job was to head off people the Governor didn't want to see, and corral the people he did, and make both sides feel as if something nice had happened to 'em; and I will say this for him, that he was the smoothest article that ever wore glad rags in the morning.

"His Excellency," said he, "begs you will make yourself comfortable in the reception-room for a few moments until he can receive you. You will find the latest American papers and magazines on the table, Sir; and if you care for any refreshment after your hot drive, will you kindly ring the bell?"

"Don't mention it," said I. "The pleasure's mine."

The reception-room was about as big as the main dining-room in the biggest American hotel. It was so big it made you feel like a straw hat dropped overboard from an Atlantic liner, when you're far enough out so's you don't know if the Marconis are coming East from Honolulu or West from Moscow.

At one end of it there was a handsome, hand-made marble statue of Queen Victoria; and all round the walls there were oil paintings of the Governors who'd got through governing and gone home to their families.

"Well," said I to myself, "let's see what happens when you ring the free-lunch bell."

And I rung it.

I didn't have time to get my hand back to base before two coons shot into the room, one with a tray of sandwiches and the other with a choice line of bottled goods. But it wasn't my turn just then at the medical comforts, for the confidential valet came in and said:

"His Excellency will receive you at once, sir, if you will come this way."

"No time to get a little refreshment after my hot drive?" said I.

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"I'm afraid not," said he. "I must ask you to follow me at once, Sir."

So I got up and followed him.

I've often thought of that moment, because it was the first time I'd ever run up against a thing that I've lived a good deal with since. It's one of those differences between the Britishers and the Americans that's there all right, but you can't explain why—like the white meat and the dark meat on a turkey.

When the American government wants you to do anything it sends along a broken-down prize-fighter with an alcoholic breath and a cheap cigar sticking out of his face; and he pushes you round and says: "Get a move on, there!" so's you feel it's up to you to go contrary with him and put up a fight.

That's not the way with the British government—no, Sir.

When it's made up its mind what you've got to do, the British government hands it out to you very smooth—sort of all velvet and a yard wide—and you get up and do it all right every time, whether you like it or not.

But you don't feel any jolt, because that quiet, wouldn't-hurt-a-child method acts on the

course of government just about like a shock-absorber acts on the course of an automobile. It won't save you from running into a wall, or having your machine stolen, or getting a hot bearing once in a while; but so long as you keep moving it'll make a lot of pretty bad roads slip away under you as if they were boardwalks.

The first thing I knew I was standing up shaking hands with a thin little man in white clothes; and it didn't take me long to size *him* up. I hadn't been fifteen years in the packing business not to know the real thing when it came my way.

He had a grip on him like a letter-press and eyes like a snake, and his hair and his moustache and his nails were all trimmed off short; and he took a number nine hat and a number six shoe, just the opposite to most folks. He spoke very slow, with a kind of drawl, but very clear and distinct, and he never had to hunt round for the right word.

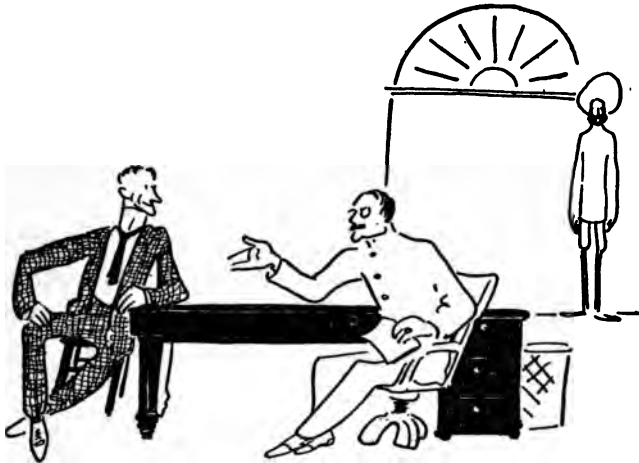
He kept himself so still all the while, it was like trying to be sociable with a corpse—not a wink of his eye nor a turn of his head nor a move of his hands—he just sat there like a chunk of wood, and looked right plumb at you

as though he was examining your eyes to see if you needed glasses.

"P. Q.," said I to myself, "that man's keeping all his energy stored away until he needs it, and when he does start to move things round I don't want to be in the way."

"Mr. Stack," said he, "I've heard about you from Captain Elisha B. Jenks of the United States Navy."

"You don't say," said I; "why, Elisha and I were to school together up in Calais, Maine.



He went into the navy because he liked scrap-  
ping, and he's never seen a fight, barring a  
prize-fight, from that day to this. Say, when  
did you see him last?"



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"This morning," said he; "he's just come in on the battle-ship *Manhattan*."

And then the Governor did the talking, and I did the listening.

Half an hour later I was back in the hotel, figuring out what the Governor'd put up to me.

I can't give it to you the way he gave it to me, for the same reason that Jim Sulzberger, the sign-painter down in Center Street, can't give you anything that you'd mistake for a Sargent portrait, even though he'd just won a few in a church bazaar, and had 'em all out in front of him to copy from.

But, cutting out all the fine dictionary words and putting it in plain American, it was like this:

There was a liberal administration in office in England, and they'd withdrawn the troops from the colony and recalled the fleet—partly so's they mightn't hurt the feelings of the natives by appearing to distrust 'em, and partly so's the other Great Powers might have a chance of saying: "Dear old England, see how she's quitting her bad habits and settling down to a quiet old age."

Well, it appeared that there were only two

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thriving industries up in the Sultan Ali's country, and one was piracy and the other was slave-raiding; and the liberal government, having taken away the troops and the war-ships—so's if there *was* any fighting no one could get hurt except the Britishers—had written out to the Governor, telling him that these industries must be shut down on p. d. q., for the sake of the well-known humanity of England.

So the Governor'd sent up to the Sultan Ali, who was the main guy back in the bosky, asking him to please stop pirating and child-snatching, because the liberal government didn't like it and it went against the well-known humanity of England.

The Sultan Ali'd sent back to say that if the Governor didn't like the way he was acting, he'd better come up and take it out of his hide; and that, anyway, he was getting tired of having a lot of Britishers trying to interfere with those pursuits which his people had always regarded as gentlemanly occupations, and that he'd just about made up his mind to come down to Palmtown and clean up the whole bunch.

And the Governor'd got it straight from some one in the know that as soon as the rice crop was reaped—which'd be in about two

weeks' time—the Sultan was going to start down country with an infuriated army bent on destroying the despotic power of England, that wanted to change the harmless native customs.

What the Governor put up to me was this—would I go up in the bosky to sell Diamond Brand, and hold up the Sultan for a week or two, so's the Governor'd have time to send round somewhere to borrow a few soldiers? Like as not I'd be killed; but if I got through all right, it was two thousand dollars in my pay-envelope and no questions asked.

The only thing he could do for me was to lend me an interpreter; but I'd have to go as an American citizen and take all the risks myself.

Well, it looked like a sporty proposition, and I said to myself:

“Phineas Quigley Stack, what'd the boys say if they knew you'd turned down a real live gamble of this kind?”

So I sent a note to the Governor, saying:

Will pull out to-morrow morning.

It was about two o'clock by this time, and I thought it was up to me to go and talk the matter over with Elisha B. He'd never been in a

fight; but he'd spent more'n ten years thinking up every kind of scrap he *might* get into, and working out what he'd do in every case, supposing any *should* turn up.

I thought, perhaps, some of 'em might have a dash of Sultan in 'em. Anyhow, he was a brainy man, and I knew he'd do his best for me. So I hired a sampan and went off to the *Manhattan*.

The captain was right glad to see me, and we chewed the rag for two hours.

'Peared as though I'd made a pretty good guess when I figured that he'd maybe get a Sultan or two floating around in his pipe dreams. We had out a chart of the coast, showing the Sultan Ali's territory, and between us we fixed things so's your Uncle Phineas began to see his way clear.

Well, as I was going to leave next morning, I'd got to get a move on, so I left the captain and his nice, sassy battle-ship and went back to the hotel.

When I got there I found an undersized, melancholy looking coon waiting for me.

"I'm your interpreter," said he.

"Glad to make your acquaintance," said I.  
"What do they call you at home?"

"If I'd my rights," said he, "my name and title would be Sliman Hammid Hassan, Orang Kaya-Kaya Sri Adika Raja."

"Forget it, my son," said I; "and without wishing you any harm, I'm glad you haven't got your rights, because now I can just call you Mungo for short."

After an hour's talk with Mungo, I found he suited me as well as if he'd been custom-made. He had real aristocratic dago manners—smooth as silk to his superiors, and always abusing those under him—and he was a liar and a thief and a cut-throat.

Consequently, he was very popular with the ladies—women out there having just about the same taste as they have at home, the young ones and the good-lookers not caring to waste much time on any quiet, respectable, half-way decent man.

Next morning we started up-river. We had two big boats: one loaded with me and Mungo and a native food-spoiler, and the other with Diamond Brand. I'd fixed 'em both up fine and dandy with American flags that Elisha B. had loaned me.

I didn't take any gun with me, and I made Mungo leave his ancestral sword behind. He



Mungo, for Short  
23

didn't like that. He said that if he hadn't got that thin, long, wiggly dagger along, the Sultan's people'd say he was no true sport; but I told him that if he took his old dagger along and used it on any one, he'd get killed, and I guessed he'd rather stay alive and have folks say he was a coward than be dead and have 'em say what a game sport he'd been when he was alive; and, anyhow, I wasn't going to let him take it along.

I didn't need a calculating machine to tell me that if I was going to get ahead of the Sultan Ali, it wouldn't be by force, because I knew that if ever that old salamander got it into his grey matter that I was looking for trouble, he'd ask me along to have a drink and then order a couple of trained elephants to kneel on my chest.

The only thing I had with me in the way of life-saving appliances was a dago-dazzler—one of those fancy passports issued by the Department of Agriculture in Washington, all covered with fine writing and pictures, with a bunch of coloured ribbon in the corner and a big seal with an edge on it like a buzz-saw.

It wasn't made out in my own name; but it was mine, all right, for I'd bought it in Hong-

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Kong from a bug-sharp that hadn't got the currency to settle his hotel bill; and I guessed all names'd look alike to the Sultan.

There's places where a dago-dazzler doesn't cut much ice, but it was dollars to doughnuts that the Sultan'd have a kindly feeling for it when I had Mungo explain that it was from the President of the U. S. A., telling him to treat his Uncle Phineas good and white, and he'd do the same by him some day.



## CHAPTER III

### *STACK HITS THE JUNGLE*

**I**T took us five days and five nights to reach Batu S'gumpal, the Sultan's capital; and many a time on the trip I said to myself: "P. Q., why didn't you stay at home and be a farmer?"

As long as we were in British territory it was all right. The sun burnt us up by day and the mosquitoes ate us up by night, and once in a while an alligator'd come alongside and give the boat a push; but all that didn't amount to shucks, because every ten miles or so we'd come to a neat little police station with a cool piazza and a chair to sit on and a dark-complected policeman with a white uniform and a stock of polite conversation.

And then, again, the Britishers kept the river clear of snags; and every so often, just as you were beginning to think you'd got clear away into the everlasting jungle, you'd see a telegraph-pole. I tell you it was a great feeling

to think that telegraph-pole held a wire that could start something buzzing against little Mamie Hosmer's ear in the Western Union office at the Penobscot Exchange up in Calais, Maine.

Why, if I could have been certain that Mamie was right there at the desk, blame me if I wouldn't have—oh, pshaw!

As soon as we passed the last British outpost, gee, but we got all that was coming to us, and we got it good and plenty.

First thing, we were held up by a boat-load of natives armed with spears and knives.

"Now, Mungo," said I, "earn your pay."

"No," said he, "you'd better talk to 'em yourself; there's one of 'em understands English."

"Not on your life," said I. "D'you suppose I'm one of the kind that hires a dog, and then does the barking himself? Well, I guess not."

So he opened up on 'em.

Of course, I don't know what he said; but it must have been pretty hot stuff, for in about half an hour the warriors handed him two chickens and a bunch of bananas. Then they pulled off to the bank and stood there, giving a sort of college yell until we were out of sight.

Well, that was all right. But by and by we came to a place where the forest had fallen into the river, and we had to spend three hours cutting a way through for the boats.

And so it went on, half the time chewing the rag with a lot of savages, and half the time fighting the river, and sitting up all night, scared to death, listening to tigers and things sniffing around on the bank about six feet away from your head.

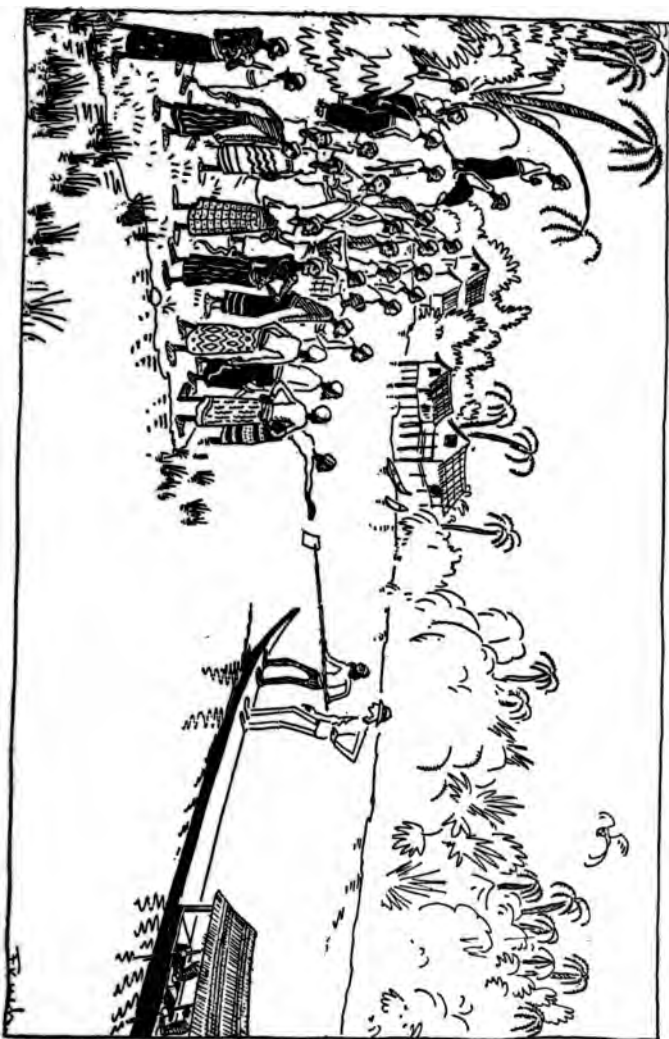
Often I said to myself:

"P. Q., this is the romance of commerce that you read so much about in the magazines. Well, no more for your uncle. Just give him a quiet little place on Riverside Drive, and a stuffed parrot'll be all he'll need in the way of the wild tropical jungle."

We got to Batu S'gumpal on the morning of the sixth day, and about twenty thousand people, more or less, came down to the water-side to give us the once-over.

They were all armed; and once in a while one of 'em'd pull a long wiggly knife out of his clothes and run his thumb along the edge and smack his lips as though he saw food coming his way.

"Mungo," said I, "I don't know but what



The Docile Millions of Asia

you'd better let the folks know what we're here for before they get nervous."

But Mungo'd thought of that already; and he whipped out a long yellow silk envelope, stuck it in a cleft at the end of a bamboo-pole, and handed it to one of the coons on the bank.

That seemed to work all right, for the coon started off up-town with the letter, and the crowd followed him.

We didn't see another mortal soul for more'n five hours. At the end of that time back came the crowd, looking pretty hungry and grouchy, it seemed to me; and one of 'em handed Mungo a letter, and the others all set up a yell.

"Now, Mungo," said I, "don't waste any time; just tell me quick when they've fixed the execution for, so's I can have a shave and not keep 'em waiting."

"It's all right," said he. "There's not going to be any execution just yet. The Sultan says he'll see us to-night at eleven."

"And what are the boys yelling about?" said I.

"Oh," said he, "that's just a native custom to yell like that when the Sultan sends a letter to any one. It enables the people to keep track of the Sultan's mail."

"And what are they yelling?" said I.

"Well, you can't very well translate it into English," said he; "but in a general way it means: 'May your feathers always be plentiful as long as you enjoy the Sultan's favour; and when you lose it, may we be on hand to pull your feathers out.'"

"I get you, Stephen," said I. "It's a sort of 'welcome the coming, speed the parting guest' idea."

By this time it was so hot that every one made a dive for cover. The crowd cleared out over the steep bank of the river and disappeared; and Mungo and I sat under the thatch-roof of the boat and talked things over.

"Now, Mungo," said I, "you listen to me. I'm going to tell you what I want done up here, and all you've got to do is to help me get it done.

"You don't have to know why I want things just the way I do want 'em; and if ever you try and hand me out any guff about not being able to give me what I want, but having something on hand just as good—only with a different label—why, I'll push you overboard one night and let an alligator bite you."

"Well," said he, "what *do* you want?"

"What I want," said I, "is to sell the Sultan two thousand cases of Diamond Brand Sausage; and, as I've only got a hundred cases with me, I want to stay here with the Sultan until I've got the other nineteen hundred cases from Hong-Kong and delivered 'em to him right here and got my money for 'em."

"Well," said he, "you might as well give up the idea first as last and save yourself a lot of trouble. The Sultan's going to make war on Palmland in about two weeks' time, and you can't get your sausages up here in less than two months; and by that time the Sultan'll be in Palmtown and have looted all the stores and got all the sausages he wants; and, besides, the Sultan's a Mohammedan, and doesn't eat sausages, because they're made of pork."

"Now, see here, you poor simp," said I, "just this once I'll explanation it to you; but next time you've got to cut out all this raising of difficulties. If there were no difficulties in the way of shoving this deal through, there'd be no money in it; and the job'd be handled by some lazy, good-for-nothing cripple out of a Drunkards' Home."

"The way you've got to look at this thing is this: If the boss—that's me—wants the Sul-

tan to stay at Batu S'gumpal and play sauses, and the Sultan wants to go to Palmtown and play war, then something's got to be done to make the Sultan change his dates. Now, when you've got that idea fixed in your fool head, you cut your work in half; because, instead of having to think of me at all, you can employ your infant mind in keeping the Sultan right here until I've done with him.

"As to Mohammedans not eating pork—well, you know as much about that as a cow knows about Sunday. If you were in *my* country, the people'd tell you that Christians don't eat horse; but I know better, because I'm one of the crowd that sell the people what they *do* eat.

"I don't mean to say that any Christian drives a real live horse up to the butcher and says: 'Here, I'll leave this noble Arab with you, only send me home a nice sirloin-steak out of him,' any more than I mean that a Moham-medan hunts round for a hog and has a pork-chop cut off him.

"But one crowd eats horse, all right; and the other crowd eats hog, all right—only they don't know it.

"But, allowing for all that, you're still away



off because you've got it in your top-piece that Vienna sausages are made of pork. Now, you take it from me, my son, there's blamed little meat of any kind in a Vienna sausage; and what there is doesn't come from the hog, but from the Junior League of Cowville."

Whilst I was handing out wisdom to Mungo he groaned once in a while, as though he'd got a pain in his inside. It may have been the heat, or it may have been the shock of having to absorb what the smart ad-writers call "food-facts." Anyhow, from that time on Mungo devoted his energies to overcoming the difficulties as they crowded down the pike, and quit going off the road to hunt for 'em.

In the cool of the evening Mungo and I had another conference.

"Do you know anything much about this Sultan?" said I.

"Not a thing," said he, "except that people say he's a furious old devil, and that he murdered twenty-seven of his nearest relatives in order to get to the throne."

"That's all right," said I; "a man's always a little free with his family. It looks as though the Sultan wants what he wants when he wants

it. That suits us, all right, because all we've got to do is to make him think he wants two thousand cases of sausages."

"It's easy," said Mungo; "it'll be like stealing a dead mouse from a blind kitten."

"Now, Mungo," said I, "you talk the way I like to hear you. But I want to say one thing to you in case we get into trouble, and that's this—there's always three people in a town can help you out of a mix-up if you can make it worth their while. One's the prettiest unmarried girl, one's the man that *has* the most money, and the other's the man who *owes* the most money."

I was going to give Mungo a few points on how to handle a trade with such people, when we heard a yelling out of the jungle, and before you could turn round there was the crowd back on the bank.

This time it was a sort of reception committee that'd been sent by the Sultan to fetch us along to the palace. I didn't like the looks of that committee. One of 'em was an arm shy, another had three fingers off his right hand, and the third had a harelip.

Mungo said they were the only remaining

relatives of the Sultan—barring four wives and twenty-nine children—and that they were high officials of the court.

“Why didn’t he kill ’em off along with the rest when he was at it?” said I.

“Well, they’re cripples, more or less,” said he, “and couldn’t do any harm; and, besides, it looks better if you have *some* relations left. It gives a man a bad reputation if he kills ’em *all*.”

“But the robber with the harelip,” said I. “He looks to be a pretty husky pirate.”

“Oh, it’s different with him,” said Mungo; “you see, there’s a law here preventing a man with a harelip from ever being Sultan, so he’d gain nothing by killing the present Sultan; and, besides, he’s got a very fine job as it is. The people think it’s good for the crops to have a man with a harelip around; so they all ante up a few cents each year, and it mounts up pretty well, and every fifth year they have a jack-pot.”

“Is it safe to go with ’em?” said I.

“Well, I won’t exactly put it that way,” said Mungo. “We’ll say it’d be very unsafe *not* to go with ’em.”

So we went along.

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Well, sir, it was a short trip; but I will say this for it, that no rubber-neck car ever gave me better value for my money.

First, we passed the place where they kept the Royal elephants. There were about forty of 'em; and some of 'em were cute little baby elephants, no bigger than a summer cottage; and others were full-size, grown-up elephants; and one of 'em'd just had his evening bath, and two men were massaging him with bricks.

Then we came to the Royal tiger-house and the Royal monkey-house and the Royal snake-house; and by that time it was dark. And I was just as glad it was, because I'd seen a good many bones lying around in all those Royal houses, and they didn't look to me like the bones of any animal whose bones I'd ever seen.

I said to myself: "P. Q., like as not they're the bones of the last smart drummer that blew in from Palmtown to sell canned goods."

I was glad enough when Mungo said:

"Here's the house they're going to put us in; and they're going to bring along some fried snails as soon as they've caught 'em."

Well, after about an hour they brought us along some pretty good food. It may have been snails, and it may not—I've been too

long in the packing business to try and guess what food is by the way it tastes—anyhow, I fed Mungo some of it first to make sure it wasn't poisoned, and then I had mine.

It was pleasant, easy food to eat, and tasted something like our Diamond Brand Veal Loaf, only the fellow'd put in more meat than I'd have let any of my boys put in, more'n once, if I'd known it.

At a quarter of eleven the Sultan's one-armed cousin came along to show us the way to the palace.

## CHAPTER IV

### *STACK IS HUSTLED BY THE EAST*

**T**HE One-armed Cousin was a slow and thoughtful pedestrian; and as the palace was on the top of a hill, and as the night was dark, and as there weren't any street-lamps in Batu S'gumpal, and as there weren't any streets to put 'em in, supposing there *had* been any, I was afraid we'd be late for our appointment with the Sultan.

"Mungo," said I, "why doesn't the Royal Cripple step lively? I don't want to keep the Sultan waiting."

"You should worry," said he; "you're not likely to see him this side of two o'clock in the morning, and you'll need all your luck to see him then."

I didn't get onto Mungo's idea at the time; but I found out later on, all right.

Well, it must have been about half past eleven when we reached the palace enclosure. There was a sentinel there, but he was asleep,

and the gate was open, and we might just as well have walked right in. But, no, Sir; that wasn't the custom of the country.

First the One-armed Cousin kicked the sentinel into a state of semi-consciousness. Then he stepped back outside the gate. Then the sentinel shut the gate. Then we knocked at the gate. Then the sentinel drew his sword and asked who was there. Then we told him. And then he opened the gate and we passed in.

It seemed sort of roundabout to me; but Mungo said it had to be like that because there was a law that if a sentinel let any one in without finding out who he was then the sentinel had to be buried alive; and so if you didn't wake the sentinel up and tell him who you were, he'd be killed the next day, and pretty soon there wouldn't be enough sentinels to go round.

The Sultan's palace was a great big one-story building, made of wood and leaves, and flattened-out kerosene-cans, and split bamboo. It was raised up about ten feet from the ground on posts, and the space under it was used as a goat-farm.

We wandered round a good deal on our way to the audience-hall, and as the floors were

made of thin strips of bamboo that gave two inches or so under your tread, I felt kind of seasick by the time we stopped in front of a door, through the cracks of which a little light and a lot of smoke greeted us.

The One-armed Cousin went into the audience-hall and left us standing outside in the dark. For a while everything was quiet, and we could hear some one laying down the law pretty slick. But, after a bit, another fellow chipped in, and then a third, and a fourth, and presently it seemed as though every blamed soul in Batu S'gumpal was shooting off his face the other side of that door.

Then, all of a sudden it was quiet again—about so's you could have heard a steamboat whistle—and we were taken inside and put to sit down on a bench at the back of the hall.

Well, it was a new one on me, all right. The hall was about sixty feet long, with seats round the sides, same as a skating rink; only the floor, being made of split bamboo, and laid pretty uneven at that, looked as if it had just had a Marcel wave.

At the farther end there was a stage, and on the stage was the Sultan's throne—all gold, and broken looking-glass, and red flannel.





The Sultan was seated on the throne, smoking a long cigar. He'd run to flesh a good deal in his old age, and as the throne'd been made for him when he was young he didn't fit it very well, but hung over a good deal at the sides.

There must have been about a hundred and

fifty people in the hall, some standing around in groups and some seated on the side benches. They were about as hard-looking a crowd as I'd ever seen; and they all had knives stuck in their belts, something like the one I hadn't let Mungo bring along.


Once in a while the Sultan'd snap out a name, and one of the crowd'd run up on the stage and go down on his marrow-bones in front of the throne. Then he and the Sultan'd buzz at one another for a quarter of an hour or so, and then it'd be some one else's turn.

After about two hours of this sort of thing, and only six men disposed of, I worked it out that my turn'd come around two weeks from the following Thursday afternoon; but just as I was starting in to check over my figures Mungo said:

"Come along, the Sultan wants to take you next."

Up we went onto the stage, and all the folks crowded round to see the fun.

I hadn't been talking to that Sultan more'n five minutes before I began to feel as though I'd bitten off more than I could chew; and by the time he'd taken my dago-dazzler and my watch from me, and put two men alongside



of me with their knives almost sticking into the small of my back, I was good and scared.

You see, I was like a lot of people you meet back home in the States. I'd thought that once I'd got at the Sultan I could turn loose some fine, civilized talk on him and make him see how foolish and wicked his own style of living was.

As I stood there, I remembered one man in particular who'd told me that if instead of trying to shove my ideas down the throats of the natives, same as he said the Britishers did, I just handled 'em gently and *explained* the advantages of a public-school system and town meeting and loving your neighbour more'n yourself, same as we do in the U. S. A., the natives'd take a fancy to me right off and do just as I told 'em, because they'd see in a minute what a superior mind I had.

That man was born in Boston, and he'd never been farther west than Springfield, Mass.; but he'd slept through a lot of meetings at Faneuil Hall, and so he knew just how to handle the native problem.

Gee, if I'd had him there in Batu S'gumpal that night I'd have elected him Chief Ex-

plainer to the Sultan, and there wouldn't have had to be no recount.

But he was away back in his Beacon Street Club, telling the boys about the mild-mannered Malay and the docile millions of Asia; and there was I on that blamed platform trying to show cause why I shouldn't be turned into tiger food—and no chance to appeal on a bill of exceptions, and no newspapers to sound the martyr's clarion for me, not even a bunch of anti-punishment cranks to petition the Sultan to give my better nature a chance of asserting itself and not to waste a life that might some day be of service to the State.

No, Sir; I was just plain up against it!

The Sultan didn't waste much time on my dago-dazzler. He ripped the ribbons off and then handed it to the One-armed Cousin, who shoved it through a hole in the floor into the goat-farm.

When he saw my watch, and pressed the knob and heard it strike the hour, he seemed real pleased, and I began to hope that he was going to show a good average up in the "docile" class. But it didn't look like that after he and I and Mungo'd had a three-cornered "in-

terchange of courtesies"—that's what my Boston friend called it when you chewed the rag with any one who was a white man in everything except the colour of his skin.

It jarred me the way that fool's wisdom kept coming back to me that night.

"What're you doing up here in Batu S'gumpal?" said the Sultan.

"Oh, I just happened in," said I, "to see if I couldn't sell a few cases of sausages."

"Weren't you afraid," said he, "to place yourself within the grasp of my powerful arm, that makes the day and the night and the march of the seasons, and the ebb and flow of the tides?"

I was going to reply: "Not so as you'd notice it," but, just in time, I thought that it might vex him if I said I wasn't afraid, so, in order to make him feel good, I said:

"Scared pink, Your Highness."

But I saw in a minute that I'd make a bad break, for the Sultan came back at me quicker'n a flash.

"Then you did *not* come here to sell sausages," said he.

"I don't get you, Sultan," said I.

"Because," said he, "the mere desire to sell sausages never made a brave man out of a coward."

"I never was a coward," said I. "I've always been noted for my bravery."

"Then," said he, "you lied when you said you were afraid."

"No, Sultan," said I, "I spoke the truth. You see you've got this thing all gummed up. If I was afraid to come up to Batu S'gumpal and *didn't* come, then I'd've been a coward, but when I was afraid to come and came all the same, then that shows that I was a brave man, for it doesn't take a brave man to do anything he isn't afraid of doing."

"There's something in that," said the Sultan; "but it only confirms my suspicions about you, because I can't believe that a man as brave as you would come all this way just to sell sausages."

"Well," said I, "what does Your Highness think I came up here for?"

"I don't know," said he, "but I'm going to find out. Like as not you came up on some underhand business connected with those benighted Britishers down in Palmtown. Anyhow, we'll begin by confiscating your sausages

and putting you and your smooth-talking friend in jail."

That got my goat, and so I said:

"Well, Sultan, I haven't done any harm, have I, coming up into your old country?"

"No," said he, "you've not; and I'm going to take blamed good care you don't."

At this point Mungo said to me in English, so's the others couldn't understand:

"You'd better be more polite to him, or he'll take a dislike to you."

"Oh, I'd hate to have him do that," said I. "Let's go home to jail."

I started to leave the platform. But the Sultan wasn't through with me yet.

"You're an American?" said he.

"From Calais, Maine," said I.

"Were you ever a soldier?" said he.

"Sure," said I. "I'm a veteran of the Spanish War."

"Well, well," said he. "They tell me you gave those Spaniards a terrible doing up down there in Cuba."

"Something fierce," said I.

"They say you Americans eat your enemies alive," said he.

"Every time," said I, "and every one of 'em."

"I'm glad to know that," said he, "because if I find it necessary to execute you, I'll see that it's done in American fashion."

This sort of thing passes for wit up in Batu S'gumpal, and the crowd gave me the merry ha-ha.

"For Heaven's sake, Mungo," said I, "let's get out of this before I make any more breaks."

They took us off to a remote part of the palace, and threw us into a dark room and left us.





"What Are You Doing Up Here?"

## CHAPTER V

### *STACK GOES TO JAIL*

**A**S soon as the door of the prison closed on us, and we'd heard the sentinel make himself comfortable on his sleeping-mat outside, Mungo wanted to discuss the situation with me; but I was all used up and went to sleep, leaving Mungo to talk himself dry.

I dreamed about the good old U. S. A., and how my Uncle Peter, that had the barber-shop down at Old Point Comfort, died and left me a million if I'd marry his wall-eyed daughter Ruth, and how I went and told Mamie Hosmer about it and said I'd rather marry her and owe a million than marry Ruth and have a million paid me, and how she smiled and put her little head on my shoulder and her arms round my neck, and—oh, pshaw!

Well, you didn't have to have a bell-boy to call you in Batu S'gumpal. About five

o'clock the goat-farm under the palace broke into a state of healthy activity, and after that the flies got to work, and then it began to heat up, and the lizards and snakes and spiders and things that lived in the roof came in out of the glare.

About eight the door opened and they brought us our breakfast. It wasn't one of those dainty repasts you read about in "How to Make Hubby Happy"—no, Sir; it was just cold boiled rice and salt fish and a *can of sausages!*

"Gee, Mungo," said I, "they don't waste much time round these parts."

And then I saw that the can had been broken open with an ax. That jarred my professional sensibilities.

"You tell 'em, Mungo," said I, "that even if they are robbers, there's no call for 'em to spoil the looks of things that way. There's a patent opener attached to each can; and if they don't know how to use it, why, now as I *am* here, I'd just as lief show 'em."

As soon as we'd cleared away the breakfast things—a simple operation, consisting of pushing the fish bones and the empty sausage can, and the banana leaves they'd serve the rice on,

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through a hole in the floor down into the goat-pen—I called the meeting to order.

“Now, Mungo,” said I, “you listen to me and take notice of what I say, because something tells me this isn’t any button-button-who’s-got-the-button game we’re up against.

“The simplest thing, if we could do it, ’d be to climb through the floor the first dark night and go back to Palmtown, leaving the sausages behind as a souvenir and charging the cost to advertising. How does that strike you?”

“Well,” said Mungo, “you’d get the advertising all right, only you wouldn’t know it, because you’d be dead. There’d be no difficulty in climbing through the floor, and I dare say we’d get outside the palace enclosure without much trouble; but as soon as we were outside we’d be as good as dead men.

“You see there’s no means of getting out of Batu S’gumpal. The river’ll be watched, and if you try and force your way through the jungle to the coast you’d either die of starvation or be eaten by a tiger; and, even supposing you reached the coast, you’d still be in the Sultan’s territory and you’d be snapped up by the first band of natives you ran across.”

"Objection sustained," said I. "The only thing, then, is to make the Sultan let us go free of his own will."

"It doesn't sound natural," he said.

"I know it doesn't," said I, "but it sounds a blamed sight more natural to me than being eaten alive or starving to death in the jungle."

I spent the rest of the day turning the situation over in my mind. I figured it out that the Sultan'd do one of two things—either kill us off-hand so's to avoid the risk of our getting away, or feel sort of doubtful about murdering an American, and discuss the matter with his councillors.

If it went one way, then Mungo and I'd be the flies in the tanglefoot; but if it went the other way, and he started to chew the rag about it, why, then, there'd be a lot of delay, and that was all I needed.

The chances were against his killing us right off the reel, because there's mighty few men in the world that can start bang off and do just as they've a mind to; and the higher you go the less likely are you to run up against 'em.

But once the old guy put it up to his councillors, I knew some'd take one side and some

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the other—not on account of any of 'em caring a continental what happened to me and Mungo; but because it's always the way that when any one gets up and says, "Dig him in the slats," some one's dead sure to say, "Spare him, he's an orphan," sometimes just from natural-born cussedness, sometimes because he's got his knife into the other fellow and wants to down him on general principles, and, sometimes, because he's been squared by the party that's in the consommé.

Well, if it happened that way, and I could get into touch with the let-him-down-easy gang, why, then, there might be something doing for P. Q.

Along in the afternoon they brought us another meal. It was the same as before, only they'd got onto the patent can-opener and the rice was hot instead of cold.

After dinner Mungo and I got down to business and I told him how things looked to me.

"The first thing," said I, "is to find some one who'll blow in once in a while and give us the news."

"That's so," said he, "but who're you going to get?"

"Well," said I, "what's the matter with buying the sentinel out there on the mat. Hasn't he any use for money?"

"Oh, he's like the rest of us as far as that goes," said Mungo. "He could use a barrel of it and then come back for more to pay his debts with; but he's no good to us, he's stone deaf."

"How do you know that?" said I.

"It's a native custom," said he, "to have deaf sentinels inside the palace. You see, it's not easy to bribe a deaf sentinel who doesn't know how to read, because you can't explain what you want him to do."

"Well, anyhow," said I, "there's one thing about a deaf sentinel, and that's this—that if the prisoner *does* happen to get into touch with any one from outside they can talk all they want without being overheard, provided it's night-time and the sentinel can't see."

"It doesn't work like that here," said Mungo, "because the floors are so rickety that if any one comes within twenty yards of you it wakes up the sentinel just the same as if you'd kicked him, and then he yells until some one comes along to see what's the matter."

This certainly did look like a pretty tough

proposition; and, as I'd been up late the night before, I thought I'd sleep on it.

In the middle of the night I was awakened by the sentinel yelling blue murder.

"What did I tell you?" said Mungo. "There's some one coming."

And, sure enough, in about a minute the door opened and the One-armed Cousin came in with a lamp in his hand.

While he and Mungo were talking things over it occurred to me that perhaps this was my chance to lay out a little money to advantage, because, on general grounds, it seemed as though any one-armed man'd be more likely to be short of money than any two-armed man in a country where stealing was the chief industry.

"Can't we buy *him*?" said I.

"No, you can't," said Mungo. "He's a relative of the Sultan, and whenever he wants money all he has to do is to go and take it from the first man he meets who's got any, provided it isn't the man with the harelip or the Prince that's lost his fingers."

"How do the people like it?" said I.

"They don't have to," said Mungo. "They're not voters."



"Well, what does he want?" I inquired anxiously.

"He's come to say that the Sultan and his councillors have decided to keep us locked up in this room while they send a spy down the river to Palmtown to find out about us."

"That's the best news I've heard in a long time," said I.

As soon as the One-armed Cousin'd gone, I had a great idea. I got my lucky piece out of my left shoe, an old dollar with a hole in it, and I made Mungo peel off a long strip of the hard outer skin of one of the split bamboos, of which the floor was made, and I whittled the end of it down so's I could pass it through the hole in the dollar. Then I fastened my dollar good and tight and rubbed a little oil on it from our lamp.

"Now, Mungo," said I, "we'll soon have some one to talk to."

"What d'you mean?" said he, taken fairly aback.

"Oh, you're dead slow, Mungo," said I. "One of these days you'll be run over by a hearse. I'm going to lower this dollar down through the floor, and when the gentleman that milks the goats comes round under the

house in the morning, he'll see my dollar hanging there ready for him and he'll grab it, and when he grabs it I'll give a good hard pull on my end, and after that it ought to be easy to open a conversation."

"And what did you rub the oil on the dollar for?" said Mungo.

"That's so's the goats'll know I didn't lower it for them to eat," I replied.

"And how do you know the goat man'll see your dollar?" said he.

"Well, we've got to take our chances on that," said I. "But you'd be surprised how much notice a dollar'll attract, if it's seen loafing round without its master."



I lowered the dollar through the floor, giving it about seven feet of slack, and tied the end of the cord round Mungo's wrist.

“Now,” said I, “we’ll go to sleep. But if you get a pull on that line, for the love of Mike don’t jump round so’s you’ll wake the sentinel. Just talk to the goat man so’s he won’t be scared, and then we can discuss things with him in a friendly spirit.”

## CHAPTER VI

### *STACK GETS HIS DOLLAR'S WORTH*

**I** WAS sort of stupefied with the heat and soon fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

It didn't seem more'n a minute before I heard Mungo talking.

I thought he was having it out with a nightmare, so I gave him a kick and said: "Cut it out, Mungo, and give me a chance to forget my troubles."

But before he'd time to answer I heard another voice. It came from under the floor. Then I got onto it that it was morning and that the man had called for the dollar.

I'd thought things over pretty well, and it looked like this to me: It wasn't much use my wasting my time trying to do any business direct with the Sultan, because whatever I put up to him he'd suspect some scheme right off; and if once I let him know that I had a belt full of money next my skin, he'd just send

some one round for it and then I'd be left without any working capital.

I'd therefore got to get some real, live agent who'd take hold and hustle for me.

The first person to get into touch with was the richest man in Batu S'gumpal, barring the Sultan's crowd, because he'd sure to be the most powerful man in the town, and if I could make a deal with him things'd be apt to run smooth.

But it wasn't going to be no easy job, because, though he'd have the pull all right, it wasn't any sure thing that he mightn't think it'd pay him better in the long run to betray me instead of betraying the Sultan; and, besides, rich men come high.

But it was worth trying because, though a rich man can get most of the things he wants, he can't always get the things he wants most, and there was an off-chance that my local millionaire might be shy of something that I could help him get.

"Now, Mungo," said I, "did you haul that dollar home safe?"

"Here it is," said he.

"Well, then, you tell the man we'll give him the dollar all for himself, if he'll carry a mes-

sage to the richest man in town and keep quiet about it."

Mungo and the man under the floor buzzed away at one another for a while, and then Mungo said:

"He says the richest man in Batu S'gumpal's a Chinaman named Mee Cheong, and that the Sultan owes him a pile of money, and that he speaks English, and used to live in Palmtown."

"Gee-willikins, Mungo," said I, "this is our lucky day. What does he say about carrying a message?"

"He says he'll carry all the messages we want, only we mustn't tell any one, because if they knew he had a dollar people'd suspect he'd been doing something wicked; and, anyhow, there's a law here that if they catch a man having anything to do with a state prisoner they cut off his feet so's he can't get into mischief any more."

"There oughtn't to be any difficulty, Mungo," said I, "in getting down to business with people as practical as that."

So I wrote a note to the Chinaman saying that if he'd come and have a chat, I thought there might be a chance of doing a big trade, but that he'd better not talk about it as it was

a high-up, number-one, top-side gamble and it'd all go to pieces if any one got on to it before he and I'd come to terms.

The goat man said he'd give the letter to Mee Cheong and bring an answer in the evening.

But as soon as he'd gone I began to feel scared; and I got to wondering whether I hadn't better have tried the man who *owed* the most money instead of the man who *had* the most money.

I guess my scare was mostly due to the poor food I'd been having since I left Palmtown, which'd sort of taken the sand out of me; but whether it was that or something else—and it didn't help me worth a cent, anyhow, to know the why of it—I was just plain scared.

"Mungo," said I, "I should have left the rich man alone. He won't take no risks helping me. He's got too much to lose if things go wrong. The man I ought to have gone to is the man who owes the most money."

"I don't see how he could help you," said he.

"Oh, I don't know," said I, "there's a good many points about a man who owes plenty of money. In the first place, he couldn't owe it unless he's got lots of pull of one kind or an-


other; and, then, all the people he owes money to are pretty likely to help along any scheme he has on hand, provided it shows some chance of his getting money to pay 'em back with and doesn't involve their putting up any more cash to start things up; and, besides, he's got nothing to lose."

"Well, he's got his life to lose," said Mungo, "and that's something."

"I don't think that cuts much ice," said I. "You see all the people he owes money to have a sort of vested interest in him; and however little chance they may think they have of getting their money back, if he lives, they know it's a better chance than they have if he's dead; and so they'll all work hard to keep him from getting seriously damaged."

"That's all right," said Mungo, "but what if he gets scared of his life and says he'd rather go along comfortably owing money than run any risks in order to clear himself?"

"There's something in that, Mungo," said I, "but not much, because a man's always more ready to risk his life than his property. If it wasn't so, you wouldn't hear so often of people getting shot, in the U. S. A., from going downstairs in the middle of the night to fight an





armed burglar who's trying to get away with eight dollars' worth of silver-plated wedding presents."

And then I began to think that perhaps, after all, the prettiest girl in Batu S'gumpal might have been my sure winner, for when it comes down to corrupt influence, a pretty girl's got the clever man and the rich man whipped to a cream most every time. And a man from outside the town's a new man if he's nothing else. And a new man's always got a speculative interest for the normal woman.

It's something fierce the pull a pretty girl's got. What with those who've basked in her smiles and hope to bask some more, and those who've basked and then got married elsewhere and are scared she'll tell, and those who haven't basked but hope to, there's no end to it!

I tell you a real pretty girl with a brain to back her—and it doesn't even have to be her own brain—can do any darned thing.

She can make a rich man part up his money, or a powerful man his influence, or a clever man his brains, or a strong man his health, or an honest man his virtue. She can make any common, ordinary, garden man lie and steal—yes, by jiminy—and murder, too, if it comes

to that, just by standing close enough to him so's he can smell the natural odour of her hair, and looking at him as if she was going to faint, and half closing her eyes and drawing her breath quick.

And they call us the stronger sex! Strong nothing! It makes me tired to think of it!

"Mungo," said I, "it seems to me this blamed climate's making moss grow inside my think-tank. What we need in our business is a pretty woman. She'll do more for us than any ten men, and in half the time."

"They can get things done all right," said he. "The trouble is they talk so blamed much."

"I grant you they're strong on the chin music," said I. "But I'll bet you money you can't tell me of a woman who talked about her own affairs enough to hurt her. What a woman talks about is other folk's affairs; and if I can get the right woman I'm going to make this matter very particularly *her* affair."

We talked over things for a while; and by and by they brought us our breakfast. By mid-day, what with the food I'd had and my hopefulness about taking a pretty girl into the firm, I'd lost most of my scare and was

able to look at matters without getting rattled.

I could see that, when you came down to it, I hadn't much reason to fear the Chinaman, if once he came to discuss things, because as soon as he'd done that he'd have as much reason as I had, or more, to keep quiet, for he'd have broken the law about tampering with state prisoners.

The only danger was that he might give the show away right off the reel as soon as he got my letter; but I guessed there wasn't much chance of a Chink giving anything away until he'd had a look at it to see if it wasn't good enough for him to keep.

Along in the afternoon the goat-man came back. You can bet your sweet life I was all nervoused up while he and Mungo talked through the floor—they took so long it seemed to me as though they must be reciting the encyclopedia to one another.

Well, the upshot of it was that Mee Cheong was ill and the man hadn't been able to get the note to him, so he'd brought it back.

"Mungo," said I, "it does me good to meet a native who has a lucid interval once in a while. You tell him from me he's a cracker-jack, and then ask him about the prettiest girl

in Batu S'gumpal, for she's next on our list."

Mungo and the goat-man didn't take long to decide the beauty contest.

"He says her name's Katanda," said Mungo.

"And how does he know she's the prettiest girl in town?" said I.

"Because all the young men write poetry about her," said Mungo.

"How young are the men?" said I.

"About eighteen to twenty," said Mungo.

"I don't call those young men, I call 'em boys," said I. "No, Mungo, I guess we'll have to cut Katanda out. It's a dead sure thing she's too old for us, and, besides, her kid lovers are too young to be of any use in our business. Give the man another guess."

"He says there's another woman, called Gumpa, who gets a lot of attention," said Mungo.

"What sort of attention?" said I.

"Well, he says the middle-aged men and the widowers are all the while sending her presents."

"It's no good, Mungo," said I, "he's got the wrong lady again. This time he's spotted the richest girl, sure enough, but not the prettiest."

"How'd you know that?" said Mungo.

"Gee, Mungo," said I, "you ought to travel with a nurse, you're so simple-minded. Can't you see a middle-aged man's either too old or too young, whichever way you like to look at it, to marry just for looks? And as for the widowers, well, most of 'em-'ve married once for beauty, and there's darned few of 'em ever do it twice. Now you ask the man what girl it is that all the single men between fifty and sixty're running after; and when you tell me her name, I'll tell you the name of a sleek, lithe young lady about eighteen, very quiet and demure (the kind the old men want to marry because they think butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, and the young men want to marry because they know that if they can get her in just the right mood, she could bite an iron nail in half), who's going to help us out of this mix-up."

Mungo handed this on to the goat-man, and it seemed as though I'd asked for a size they always keep in stock, for in less'n a minute he said:

"The man says you must mean Kulani; except that every one thinks she's no girl at all, but just a female devil who casts spells over people."

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When we'd explained everything to the goat-man we lowered the letter and the ring through the floor, and settled down to await developments.

## CHAPTER VII

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Your letter to hand and contents duly noticed. Referring to your ring, I return it herewith, not having any use for same. Your acute position greatly appreciated by me, and venture to hope black cloud has silver lining.

You not understanding how great danger for your life, but I tell you must come my house this night, I hiding you with safeness till dangers past.

This not any funny business, but dam serious, and I remaining,

Your obedient servant,

KULANI.

P.S. By Jove, full speed ahead. K.

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we heard Bujang speaking under the floor, and after some talk Mungo lowered a string and pulled up two native swords. As soon as we saw 'em Mungo smiled, and I said:

"I take it all back, my son. Give me the biggest one."

Then Mungo and Bujang did a pow-wow, and I sat off in the corner, holding my own hand for company.

After a while Mungo put me next the news. It seems that Kulani had special means of finding out what was going on at Court, and she'd heard, just before she got my letter, that the dig-'em-in-the-slats party had carried the day with the Sultan, and that Mungo and I were billed for the leading parts in a public execution after breakfast next day.

The only way Kulani could save us was for us to cut our way through the floor in the middle of the night and follow Bujang to her house, where, so she said, we'd be as safe as if we were back in Palmtown.

Of course we didn't know what her game was in wishing to save our lives; but Bujang swore, on his honour as a goat-man, that it was O. K. If the worst came to the worst, and it turned out that Kulani was only having

a little fun with us—well, it looked like better sport to be slaughtered in a good old stand-up fight under the stars than to be killed in cold blood in broad daylight by some blamed hereditary executioner who probably didn't know his job.

So I told Bujang to give my love to the lady, and to tell her that if full speed ahead, by Jove or by Jiminy, was what she wanted, all she had to do was to have Bujang under the house at midnight, and her obedient servant P. Q. Stack'd be through with his beauty sleep and ready for action.

We didn't have to have any

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Bujang hadn't been gone more'n half an hour when the Harelipped Cousin blew in to tell us about the execution. Come to find out, he was the hereditary executioner I'd had in mind; but he was feeling pretty badly because the Sultan'd taken a fancy to what I'd said about the Americans always eating their en-

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It was rough on old Harelip, because he had to do the eating, and he'd been used to turn the folks off by putting 'em in a cage and running spears through 'em until they were more or less dead, and then feeding 'em to the Royal alligators.

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You may take my word for it that Mungo and I had a pretty restless evening.

About ten o'clock they brought us some cold rice and salt fish, but, as I told Mungo, I couldn't have eaten anything, not even if it'd been terrapin *à la* Maryland; and that made me think of the old joke about cherubim and terrapin, and that started me laughing; and by and by Mungo joined in, just from sympathy, same as those jumping Frenchmen'll



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I tell you, we humans are queer critters.

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But, by the time we'd begun to think the watchman was dead and it must be about half past four those twelve strokes sprung suddenly out of the night; and they sounded



so loud I had to clap my hands to my ears. It seemed to me they made noise enough to wake every one in Batu S'gumpal, including the commuters.

As the sound died away we heard footsteps under the house, and Mungo handed me a sword, and said:

"If any one gets in your way, stab him in the throat, and then give him a slashing cut across the stomach. It's best that way. The first blow'll keep him from hollering, and the second'll make him sit down right where he is, holding himself together."

"Mungo," said I, "it's easy to see you weren't educated in one of those correspondence schools. Well, let her went!"

Next thing I knew there was me and Mungo and Bujang, three armed men, out for trouble in that sticky, steamy, swampy snake-run; and, I tell you, by jiminy Christmas! it felt good.

The next half hour went quicker than a five-dollar bill at a shore hotel.

When we came to the sentry he was asleep; but the gate was closed, and Mungo was scared the creaking of the wooden hinges'd wake the man up and cause trouble, so he and Bujang got a big lump of rock and dropped it on the

man's head as he lay, and it made that nice broiled live-lobster noise you hear when you play round the claws with a pair of nut-crackers.

Oh, yes; it seems pretty brutal now, when I'm here in West Forty-Eighth Street, with a tankard of cool stuff in front of me, and a panatela stuck in my face; but the only choice I had that night was to be the broiled live



lobster or the nut-crackers, so to speak; and, however I may feel about it now, I didn't have to draw no straws that night to find out which I'd choose.

Once past the sentry, things went smooth enough, and we didn't have to kill any one else. There'd been some rain, and the hillside was slippery. Once in a while I'd get a fall, on account of my having boots on; but the others were all right, because they were bare-foot.

It all comes back to me clear as a three-reel drama, if I shut my eyes—the muddy slope of the hill; the palace enclosure beneath us, with the single flickering torch of the watchman off in one corner; the long waving arms of the cocoanut palms, showing black against a low-hung sky of grey clouds; the thousand uncouth noises of the jungle—gee! it was as lifelike as Hell Gate down at Coney.

The house of Kulani stood at the top of a hill overlooking the town, and it was backed right up against the forest. When I was a boy I saw a good deal of thick timber up in Maine, but this forest was that thick it put the Maine woods in about the same class of impenetrability as those peek-a-boo shirt-

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waists you see in the summer at Atlantic City.

Force a way through it!

Why, it was as much as you could do to push your hand into it. It was just a solid wall of trees and ferns and grasses and creepers and bamboos and cactus, and most of 'em covered with spikes as long as a sail-maker's needle, and about twice as sharp.

Well, anyhow, we got safely into the house, and Bujang took us off into a sort of store-room, and left us in the dark.

"Mungo," said I, "ask the gentleman if we can't pay our respects to our hostess."

"He says you can't," said Mungo, "because she's asleep, and no one's allowed to wake her. But you'll see her all right in the morning."

"Well," said I, "if our lady friend can enjoy her innocent slumbers, while her agents are engineering a murder and a prison-breaking, and playing general scratch with a Sultan and his policy right under her nose, I guess we needn't worry about the future. She must be hot stuff from 'way back."

So I settled myself down on some bags of dried fruit, that felt like brass door-knobs and smelt like burnt leather, and tried to do a little sleeping on my own account.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *STACK MEETS THE LADY*

**J**UDGING by the light, it must have been about half past five when I woke.

I had a funny feeling all over from lying on that knobbly dried fruit—sort 's though I'd been put through a big butter-mould.

Well, I was just going to give Mungo a kick, when I was fetched up all standing by the most awful racket I ever heard in my life.

Field-artillery and a boiler explosion and a train wreck and rock-blasting and a college yell, all mixed up together'd give you an idea of it; but even that'd be like comparing the noise of an elevated train with that of a rubber-tired baby carriage.

"Sakes alive, Mungo," said I, "I don't know as I can remember ever having been missed so badly since I was old enough to take notice."

But Mungo couldn't hear a word.

The noise went on—old brass cannon, rifles,

shotguns, six-shooters, Chinese bombs, goat-skin drums, bamboo rattles, native fireworks, tin trumpets, and I don't know what all, with a running accompaniment of every kind of yell you could tease out of a human being of either sex and every shape, size, and age in the catalogue.

A quarter of an hour of this kind of thing put me wise to the fact that the people of Batu S'gumpal took a real live interest in my movements, and I felt that a little talk with Kulani'd ease my mind a good deal.

Presently I heard light footsteps outside the room, and first thing you know the door opened, and in came Kulani.

As soon as I'd given her the once-over I said to myself:

"P. Q., you can be a whole 'don't-worry' club all to yourself. She owns the town."

She was prettier than any of the beauts that'd ever shown up in our Diamond Brand annual calendars; and that ain't no lie.

Can I describe her?

Well, I should say not—at least, not so's it'd make you understand whât she was like. No, sir; and I guess it's that way with most real big things. You can see 'em, and have

your own feeling about 'em, but you can't pass it along to the next fellow. It doesn't matter whether it's a woman or a mountain or a piece of music or a good vaudeville turn; any experience that's right outside the ordinary run of the cards leaves you alone. After a while you can't even make it seem real to yourself.

Oh, I guess I can tell you as much about her as a Harvard freshman can tell you about the latest "Salome" toe-lifter just from seeing her for ten minutes across the footlights; but when I've done my best you'll feel about as satisfied as a typhoid convalescent when the nurse sprays some beef-tea on his forehead and tells him he's had a square meal.

She was the colour of old ivory; and her eyes were tilted just enough to make you guess at a Chinese ancestor somewhere 'way back about the time of Marco Polo. From the waist up she had the figure of a sixteen-year-old Jewess, and from the waist down she was as slender as a young boy; and she had tiny little hands and feet, with delicate pinky nails.

Her mouth was larger than you'd have expected from the rest of her make-up, and she had a pretty way of parting her full, red lips and giving you just a flash of her teeth.

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And they were daisies. Not those long, staring, white tusks you see in most people, but short and broad, and about the colour of real cow's milk. They looked like split almonds half buried in rose leaves.

She was dressed in the style of the country—a very thin white silk jacket, something like a tuxedo, and a green and gold sarong, which is just a single piece of soft silk folded around the waist, and falling from the hips to an inch or two above the ankle.

She didn't wear any stockings, and her feet were slipped into dark-red leather sandals. Her hair was the blackest you ever saw, a dull, dry black, like charcoal, and it was fixed up in coils round her head with heavy, carved gold hairpins.

It's a pretty poor description of Kulani, and I know that a blamed sight better than you do. Well, you can just take it from me that she was a Peach from Peachville, and fill in the details to suit yourself.

As soon as she'd closed the door behind her she smiled and bowed and threw a sort of wriggly curtsy, beginning at her ankles and ending at her neck. It gave me a general idea of her architecture, and satisfied me that what



was there under the silk was just Kulani herself, and that no fashionable dressmaker hadn't had to sit up nights wondering how to make the clothes hang good.

"This is Kulani," she said.

"Happy to make your acquaintance," said I.

"Are you afraid?" she asked, waving her hand off in the direction of the palace, where everything was pretty quiet by now.

"Not since I've seen you," said I.

She caught on, and laughed just as natural and unaffected as a manicure lady.

"Well, you don't have to be afraid of those pigs down there," she said. "I've got 'em in the hollow of my hand."

"I knew it," said I, "the minute I set eyes on you."

I wanted to ask her a whole lot of things—how it was she spoke English and wrote those "Type A" letters, and where she'd got that "By-Jove-full-speed-ahead" idea from, and a whole census-schedule full of polite impertinence as well; but I guessed all that'd wait till we got down to some understanding as to what her general plans were in regard to me and Mungo.

She was just like any other real, female

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woman, and got onto my idea before I'd said a word.

"Now," she said, "while they're getting you some food, I'm going to tell you about how it is you're safe here, and why I speak English, and why I'm going to get you out of Batu S'gumpal, and anything else you want to know."

So she seated herself beside me on one of those bags of vegetable door-knobs and turned loose a yarn that made my recollection of "Broadway Billy Among the Bomb-throwers" fade into something like an expurgated edition of "Little Fanny and Her Friends."

Well, that story doesn't belong with this story. The milk in the cocoanut was that when Kulani was a little kid she'd been grabbed by a pirate and'd been rescued at sea by a British cruiser.

They'd taken her to Palmtown, and put her in a school for a few months until things'd quieted down after the row there'd been about the Britishers shooting up the pirates.

Then the same cruiser'd taken her back up the coast, near Batu S'gumpal, and handed her over to her people.

She showed me the card of the commander

of the cruiser—Sir Reginald Ffolkes Talbot-Wykhams—and she'd made a little silk case



Kulani

for it, and wore it tied to a string round her neck, like a charm. She acted so cute about

it I felt like taking her in my arms and hugging her—but I didn't.

"Yes," she said; "and when the time belong for me go out from the big fire-boat into the little, small boat, Tabbi Week'm talk say: 'Now, Kulani, we save you life, we kill that pirate man, we sink nine ship, we put you inside school, we bring you back you father house, and I want you must remember white man stand by you, and any time you must always stand by white man'; he kiss me, so—*tchk-tchk*—and say: 'By-by, Kulani, any time you not forgetting Tabbi Week'm.' Then I go inside the little boat, and Tabbi Week'm he climb up topside that big fire-boat and wave his hand, and shout out loud: 'By Jove, full speed ahead!'

"And then we sail into the river, and I not ever seeing him any more."

Of course, that isn't exactly like she spoke it, but it's near enough to give you her English, which was a sort of cross between Chinese laundry and dago boarding-house. But I'm not going to try and keep her style as I go along. I'll just give you the American of it.

Well, Sir, by the time Kulani was through with her yarn the food was ready, and you

can swear Mungo and I didn't need any pressing. We'd been too long without a square meal to have any of that "After you, Alphonse" left in us.

The three of us sat on mats, and the chow was handed round by four little girl slaves.

"Kulani," said I, after I'd put away about a pound and a half of rich Malay curry, "suppose the Sultan gets to know we're here, won't he try and put the jiu-jitsu on us?"

"He's not going to know it," she said, "until I'm ready to tell him. You see, Bujang dassn't open his head; and my own slaves know that if they talk I'll kill the first one I catch, and kill her good and slow."

I tell you, it made me all goose-flesh the way she got that off. Her eyes shone, and her nostrils spread, and she ran her tongue out over her lips from one side of her mouth to the other—wow!

"And, besides," she went on, "I've put a three-ring taboo round this place, and no one outside'd dare to break into it."

"Well," said I, it *sounds* good, but I don't know it from a hymn-book."

Then she told me all about what a taboo was, and how no one in Batu S'gumpal'd ever

broken one, because if you did then hair'd grow on the palms of your hands, and your teeth'd drop out, and your best girl'd run off with the chauffeur. And I asked her how the people knew that, if none of 'em'd ever tried it, and she said:

"They know it because I told 'em so," and gave me that sweet, innocent glance the ladies always give you when they're telling you about some smooth lie they've worked off on a sucker.

"You ought to have been an American girl," said I.

"Why?" said she.

"Because you can fool the men so easily," said I.

Well, Sir, about the time we'd got round to where they'd've brought on the demi-tasses for the demi-blondes—if we'd been in the U. S. A. —Mungo, who was sitting opposite me, with his face to the door, up and lets out a yell and makes for the storeroom where we'd left our swords; and, turning round to see what'd started him off, I saw standing behind me a big, ugly, hairy dago, with a knife in one hand and a club in the other.

Well, you know a man isn't built so's sitting on the floor's at all natural to him (and if you

*do* happen to be sitting on the floor it's always like it was that time with me, because you want to oblige a lady) and when you're caught that way and want to get up in a hurry because the wrong man's happened in on you, why, it isn't as easy as you'd suppose, unless you've tried it and know just how easy it isn't.

Anyhow, before I'd got mor'n half way onto my feet the flurry was over, for Kulani gave the gentleman the high sign, and he smiled and stuck his weapons away back somewhere in his clothes and sat down beside me, so's by the time Mungo arrived with the munitions we were chatting away that friendly Mungo hung back as though he thought he was butting in on a private family discussion.

"Come right in, Mungo," said I, "and join the sewing-circle, and we'll hear the gossip of the town. I don't know who the gentleman is, but Kulani seems to have got him where she wants him, and I guess it's O.K."

Well, after we'd talked about the weather and the crops, and how the cost of living'd gone up so's the only two cents' worth of anything that didn't cost six cents was a two-cent

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stamp, it came out that the hairy dago was Kulani's father, and that his name was Mat Saleh.

As soon as Mungo heard the name he said to me:

"Why, that's the same name as the man Bujang told me owed the most money in Batu S'gumpal."

"That's him, sure," said I. "You've only to look at his daughter to see how easy it is for *him* to owe money. It's the commonest kind of domestic graft. You can bet there's many a man up here that's lent poppa a hundred or two just to have him put in the good word for him with Kulani.

"Don't I know it! Why, up in Calais, Maine, I've been keeping two young girls in candy and three kid boys in snowshoes and fishing-gear for more'n two years just because they're brothers and sisters of Mamie Hosmer, and I guess if Mamie—oh, pshaw!"



## CHAPTER IX

### *STACK HUSTLES THE EAST*

**A**S soon as Kulani and Mat Saleh and me and Mungo'd got though heaving bouquets at one another—calling ourselves fountains of wisdom and towers of strength and moon-faced beauts and shady groves in the desert and cool drinks to the thirsty traveller, according to native custom—we had a long pow-wow as to how we could get a strangle-hold on the Sultan.

Kulani was all for having me stay right there inside the taboo until we'd sent down to Palmtown and got the Governor to march up at the head of an army of rescue; and old Mat Saleh wanted to borrow a thousand dollars from me so's he could give it to a man he knew who'd got stacks of pull at Court, and'd be able to persuade the Sultan to let up on me, sure pop; and Mungo was game to vote for any platform that had a plank in it that said he was to have his wages paid him quick and free transportation back home.

"Now, see here," said I, after the three of 'em'd stopped on a dead centre.

"Kulani's idea'd work like a charm if I was up here trying to furnish some playwright with material for a thrilling drama at two dollars a seat and no tickets sold to speculators. But I don't mind owning up that this throwing-down-the-gauntlet business doesn't appeal to my orphan heart. No, Sir; my long suit this deal is the white feather, and a whole sofa-pillow full of 'em at that.

"I'm no hog, and I know when I've had enough. So, if you please, it's no dying hero stunt for mine. What I want is a cowardly and rapid exit; and you may put the coward part of it in as big type as you've a mind to, provided you jerk her up a notch or two on the rapidity.

"I'm mighty sorry to disoblige a lady, Kulani; and I will say this about your plan, that it does credit to a pretty taste in sporty and picturesque methods. But if you'd read my friend, Doc Purdy's 'Hot Half-hours in Human History,' published by the Elite School Book Company of Boston, Mass., you'd see eye-to-eye with me in this matter.

"I tell you, about half those hot half-hours

came about through some beautiful lady being willing to ante up a male friend once in a while just to put a little zip into the game, always believing, of course, that they wouldn't hurt George.

"I don't blame you, my dear. It's just your sweet woman's nature, and I wouldn't have you try and change it. But you must excuse me if I can't see my way to providing you with the luxury of mourning the sudden and surprising decease of your old friend P. Q. Stack, with your pretty, tear-stained face against some manly dago breast and a manly dago arm round your waist.

"For that's how your plan'd work out, sure's you're born, just like that, a death-bed repentance—*your* repentance and *my* death-bed. No, Kulani, I like you, but you'll have to count me out.

"As for you, Mat Saleh," I went on, "man and boy I've known you about two hours; but I've known your type ever since I was a kid at school, and Willie Ross borrowed a nickel of me to give to a boy he said had pull enough with the school-marm to get me let off a hiding—dead cert. No, Mat, not this peach-crop!

"Now, see here," said I, "if I was the Shah

of Persia, or the Sham of Tartary, or the Shawl of Kashmir, I'd love to try some of those automatic, bevel-edge, sunken-hinge native ideas. But, you see, I'm just a plain American citizen, and I've got to work this thing out on American lines. Tell me what the Sultan's going to do about this war on Palmland I've been hearing so much about."

"Well," said Mat Saleh, "that'll be put through all right. He's going to start down river as soon as he's collected enough boats to carry a lot of rice to the frontier for the troops to live on till the whole army's got together from all over the country."

"And the rice," said I; "is that the main thing the troops'll get for chow?"

"The *main* thing?" said he. "Why, it's the *only* thing!"

"And if he can't get the rice, he can't have his little war?" said I.

"No, Sir," said he. "It's no rice, no fight up in these parts."

"That being so," said I, "I guess I've got your old Sultan beaten to a pulp at this war game supposing I can cut off his supply of rice."

"Sure thing!" said Mat. "But I don't see

how you're going to do it, and I don't see how it'd help you, if you did do it."

"Well, perhaps seeing things isn't your strong point, Mat," said I. "But my vision's pretty clear on one thing, and that's this: A five-gallon can of kerosene judiciously applied'll ruin more rice in five minutes than this State can grow in five months. D'you see what I'm getting at?"

"If we ruin the Sultan's store of rice, and ball up all his plans about the war, we'll give him something else to think about than trying to catch a crazy canned-goods man that's got away from him. There's more to it than that, only I won't unload any more on you just now for fear of giving you a rush of brains to the feet. How does it strike you people as far as you've got it?"

Well, Sir, it struck 'em all of a heap. I was Solomon and Socrates and Stealthy Steve and Bill the Bite, all rolled into one.

"Who's going to pour the kerosene over the rice?" said Mat.

"You are," said I.

"What—me!" said he. "Why there's a law up here that if any one monkeys with the Sul-

tan's rice they cut off his eyelids and stake him out in the sun, face up."

"Oh, no," said I; "you've got that native habit of exaggeration. I haven't seen the law, but I'll bet you money it says: 'Any one *caught* monkeying with the Sultan's rice.' Now, *you* ain't going to be caught, Mat, so just forget about the law, and try to think how you'll feel when I hand you one hundred simoleons after the job's done."

"That *does* make a difference," said he.

"All the difference in the world," said I. "It makes just the difference between breaking the law and getting caught and dying a horrible death and knowing what a fool you'd been to touch it, and performing an act of kindness for a friend and having a herd of coin stowed away in your jeans and getting that nice feeling of having sacrificed your natural inclinations on the altar of friendship. Sure!"

"Now, poppa," said Kulani, "you know what the gentleman wants, and all you've got to do is to hot-foot it out of here and get it done."

So off he went.

He hadn't been gone more'n five minutes when we heard a lot of shouting outside the house down by the taboo line. I pushed my thumb through the wall and looked out, and there was the One-armed Cousin and the Prince what'd lost his fingers, and old Harelip.



Kulani went out to what'd've been the doorstep, supposing there'd been any door or any step there—which there wasn't; only a log of wood, with notches cut in the side, leading up from the ground to a square hole in the end of the house—and had a talk with 'em, which Mungo interpreted to me after they'd gone.

'Pears they'd come from the Sultan to ask if Kulani hadn't got some patent magic she could work, so's to find out where the wild man and his spellbinder—that was me and Mungo—had got to.

"No, I *can't*," said Kulani; "and, what's more, I *won't*."

"Aw, come off," said they. "We can't go back to the Sultan with any yarn like that. It'd make him nervous."

"All right," said she. "Tell him they're here staying with me, and see how he likes that."

"Quit your fooling," said they.

"Well, if you don't believe me," said she, "tell him they're drowned or eaten by a tiger, or any old thing you like; but don't come round here disturbing my nice new taboo, or I'll hand you out a curse that'll make your toe-rings melt."

Then they sassed her back some, and then she up and cussed 'em; and Mungo said it was fine, but he couldn't translate it, because the worst swear-words he knew in English weren't strong enough to use for punctuation marks in among Kulani's flowery vocabulary. I guess it was carefully selected stock all right, for I saw 'em clap their hands over their ears and scratch gravel for all they were worth.

When Mungo'd told me all about it, Kulani said:

"It's always like that with men. They'll believe any darned thing a woman tells 'em, provided it isn't so; but, if ever she speaks the truth—and the most careful woman'll do that once in a while in an unguarded moment—they



think she's trying to qualify for membership in the local Sapphira Club."

"Kulani," said I, "you won't think me rude if I ask you rather a delicate question?"

"Go right ahead, and the more delicate it is the better I'll like it," said she, giving me one of those looks that keep the divorce lawyers busy.

"Oh, it's not so terrible delicate as all that," said I, wanting to keep her from getting goo-goo. "It'll never bring the blush of innocence to the cheek of shame. What I wanted to know was whether you'd happened to eat any of those canned sausages I used to think I owned?"

"To tell you the truth," said she, "I did. The Sultan sent me up a case of 'em shortly after your arrival."

"Do you like 'em?" said I.

"Does a cat like milk?" said she.

"I'm real pleased to hear you say that, Kulani," said I. "But tell me how the rest of the folks feel about 'em."

"They're dead stuck on 'em," said she. "They say they've got all the snap of well-hung alligator meat without its fishy flavour, and, besides, the empty cans come in so handy."

"Well, then, listen to me," said I, "and I'll tell you how you can get me safe out of Batu S'gumpal in broad day-light, with the American flag flying, and the Sultan's blessing, written on yellow silk, pinned into my hat-band."

Then I told her what my plan was. It looked to me like this:

When the Sultan discovered that his store of rice was put out of business he'd be as mad as a vicious horse under a kicking-strap. But instead of making him give up his war, it'd make him more'n ever set on it.

For those dagos out there're just like the rest of us. If you put enough difficulties in the way of anything they've really made up their minds they want, they'll work 'emself up to the point where they're just plain bug-house. Any old plan you put up to 'em when they're like that'll make 'em believe that Providence has stepped out of the everlasting procession of the cosmos for the special purpose of bringing victory to their arms—so to speak.

Now, with Kulani's reputation as a prophet-ess and general all-around magic-worker, it'd be as easy as one—two—three to make the Sultan dead sure that the spoiling of his rice

was a punishment inflicted on him by the unseen powers for ill-treating a harmless stranger who'd come to his country to provide him and his people with cheap and wholesome nourishment.

And once we'd got him as far as that, why, it'd only be a step to making him feel that by getting the gentle stranger back to Batu S'gumpal and treating him well, and heaping honours and profits on him, he'd square himself with the ghosts and witches and devils and things the native parsons work the local religious business with, and get a new deal.

And a step farther than that, and he'd see just as clear as daylight that the solution of his war difficulties'd be to buy Diamond Brand Sausage and use 'em instead of rice, thus squaring himself with the unseen powers, and making himself popular with the troops on the side.

"Now, Kulani," said I, "you've got my idea, and I'd like to know what you think of it."

"It's beautiful," said she. "And I can work it so's it'll do all you want, and give the Sultan a good jolt besides."

We talked things over for a while, and by and by Mat Saleh came back and said he'd got

everything fixed so's he'd be able to work his end of the scheme during the night.

All we had to do was to wait until some one down in the village found out next day what'd happened.

## CHAPTER X

### *STACK HUSTLES IT SOME MORE*

**I** DON'T know how Mat Saleh did it; but he did, all right.

Next morning, before we'd had time to get any breakfast, the crowd was standing three deep round the taboo line, waiting to see Kulani.

There wasn't any noise this time—no, Sir. That crowd was simply scared so's it dassen't speak above a whisper.

Come to find out later, Mat Saleh'd been wakened out of a profound sleep, so's they could give him the news. He'd told 'em there was something real queer about it, because he'd dreamed of seven devils, each with seven arms, and each arm with seven hands, and each hand with seven fingers, and each finger dripping kerosene; and these devils'd been wandering around the rice store gnashing their teeth and throwing oil on the grain.

And some one'd up and said he guessed that

was right, because he'd heard a noise in the night just like a seven-armed devil. Another man, who lived near the granary, said he'd been waked by a powerful smell of kerosene, but he didn't have to hear no gnashing of teeth for him to know it was devils. Of *course* it was devils.

What else could they expect when they took harmless lunatics like that flame-headed sausage-seller and his paid liar—my hair was pretty red in those days—and put 'em in jail. Hadn't he said from the first something bad'd happen? Well, perhaps next time they'd believe him, and not be so all-fired fresh with strangers.

I was for having Kulani go out and talk to the crowd; but she said we'd better wait, because the Sultan'd be pretty sure to send up for her, and it was a great mistake for a woman to go out hunting for anything that was dead certain to go out hunting for her; and that was the reason why the women had the men running after 'em all the time, not because the women didn't want the men just as much as the men wanted the women, but because the men never had the patience to wait till the women got tired of waiting and began to do

the running; and she guessed I'd noticed the men who got most favours from women were the ones that put up a bluff they didn't care for girls; and anyhow I *must* have noticed that the girls who got most attention from the men were the ones who pretended men didn't interest 'em; and that was all natural enough because, come down to it, what interested everybody was trying to get something that there's considerable doubt about being able to get.

By and by we heard a subdued murmur from down below, and, looking through the hole in the wall, I saw the three Royal Cousins kneeling on the ground just outside the taboo line.

My! but the starch was out of 'em all right! This time they'd come to say that the Sultan



wanted Kulani to hold a magic circle that night, because he'd just *got* to know where the clever American and his amiable friend were, so's he could bring 'em back to Batu S'gumpal and ask 'em to forgive him for his bad treatment of 'em, and send 'em back where they came from, loaded with presents, because he *knew* that what he'd done'd worked a hoodoo on his war plans.

Kulani told 'em to come back in an hour and get her answer; and, in the meantime, if the crowd didn't clear out and keep in their houses for the rest of the day, she'd have those seven devils blow in the next night and set fire to the town.

When they came back Kulani sent Mat Saleh out to tell 'em she'd hold a magic circle that night inside the taboo, and that the Sultan and the One-armed Cousin could come to it; but that the Sultan must issue an order that no one in Batu S'gumpal was to be outside his house after eight o'clock, or else there'd be trouble.

The rest of the day Kulani spent in getting ready for her magic circle.

I wanted to help her, but she said no. It was a fatal break for a woman ever to let a



man see her preparing anything—didn't matter if it was magic or washing her hair or putting her hat on or just boiling rice. The only safe thing was to let a man see the result—never the means by which it was reached.

About eleven o'clock Mat Saleh took me and Mungo and hid us behind what'd've been a stable or a garage, supposing there'd been any horses or autos in Batu S'gumpal. It was outside the taboo, and was about twenty-five yards down-hill from Kulani's house.

Kulani'd told us that all we had to do was to stay around the barn till she called out our names three times, and then we were to walk up to the magic circle and she'd fix the rest of it.

Well, sir, I wish I could give you an idea of what Kulani put over on the Sultan that night. Talk about stage management—wow!

On the hillside, in an open space, she'd made a circle of torches, about twenty feet across, the torches stuck in the ground, one every three feet or so. She'd taken her four slave girls and put 'em standing in a line inside the circle.

One was dressed in black to represent death, and she had a long wavy sword, polished so's

it caught the yellow light of the torches, and she held it so's the silver handle was level with her throat and the blade sort of crawled up in front of her, like a snake trying to climb into her mouth.

Another was dressed in red to represent life, but she had no sword or anything. She just stood there, with her hands at her side, looking straight in front of her.

Now, just to show you what sort of a proposition Kulani was, I want to tell you what she said when I asked her why she'd given one girl a sword to fit in with the death idea, but nothing to the other girl to make you think of life.

First, she said she couldn't figure it out why all men were that stupid everything had to be explained to 'em by a woman—except eating and drinking and sleeping and working. Then she told me how it was in regard to the girls.

She said death was a very simple thing. It meant the same to every one—you were either dead or alive—and so she could take a sword and let that stand for death, and everybody'd know what it stood for.

But life!

How could she give the other girl anything that'd stand for life? Why, to one man life meant love, to another hate, to one money, to one strength, to one a child, to one a friend, to one a throne. There was no end to it. There wasn't *anything* you could take and have it represent life. But she'd fixed it so's every woman could see what she meant, because the one girl, with death in her hand, was looking back on what'd gone by, and the other girl, with life in her heart, was looking in front of her to see what was coming for her.

The third girl was dressed in yellow to represent fire, and she had a torch in her hand. The fourth girl was dressed in blue to represent water, and she held a brass bowl in front of her; and, looking at 'em from the barn, they stood from left to right—Water, Life, Fire, and Death.

After a time we heard the man down at the palace make his twelve strikes, and pretty soon two figures came up the hill and stepped inside the circle of flaming torches.

It was the Sultan and the One-armed Cousin. They were both dressed up to beat the band, mostly in a kind of cloth made of red silk, with gold thread woven into it, and



The Romance of Commerce

the Sultan had some kind of jewels round his neck and on his head.

They sat down inside the circle at the opposite side to the four girls, but facing them. Nothing happened for a while, and then everything was lit up for about a second by a blinding flash of light—looked to me as though some one'd touched off a piece of magnesium ribbon—and when we could see things again there was Kulani standing up in the circle just in front of the girls, facing the Sultan.

Well, sir, by this time I was where I didn't know whether the show was the real thing or only a fake, and I remember thinking that if I, P. Q. Stack, of Calais, Maine, could feel as I felt about it, why, the Sultan was probably just about ready to fold his little hands in his lap and let Kulani have things her way, by jiminy!

I can't tell you everything I saw, because it all happened pretty quick, and it's a good deal jumbled up in my mind.

But after Kulani'd sung a kind of a wild sort of a song, she threw her arms straight up in the air and stood as stiff as a post, with her eyes closed. Then the fire-girl walked slowly round the circle and stopped in front of

the Sultan and stuck her torch in the ground in front of him; and then the water-girl followed her and emptied her bowl of water over the torch and put it out. Then the death-girl went and stuck her sword into the ground alongside of the torch; and then she and the life-girl stood up close together before the Sultan, just in front of the torch and the sword, and looked down on him without saying a word.

Then the first thing I knew I heard Kulani calling my name, and I grabbed Mungo by the hand and dragged him up to the circle and, just as we reached it, there was another flash of light, and by the time we'd opened our eyes again there was I standing on Kulani's right hand and Mungo on her left.

I guess the Sultan was just about scared to death. He couldn't see me and Mungo because the two girls were standing close in front of him, and, anyway, he'd got to kneeling down with his face to the ground.

Then Kulani said something, and the girls stepped aside, and after that the Sultan looked up and saw us, and then he and the One-armed Cousin began to jabber away like Italian sailors in a shipwreck.

There wasn't much more to it, for the girls went round the circle and put the torches out one by one.

When the last torch was out, it was so dark you couldn't see the end of your nose.

Bright and early next morning up comes old Harelip to the taboo line with a letter from the Sultan, and he had three men with him with loads on their heads.

Mat Saleh went out and took the letter and the bundles and the three of 'em cleared out down the hill.

One of the bundles was a bag of old Mexican dollars and the other two had a whole flock of stuff in 'em—coloured silks, and carved silver boxes, and fancy sword-handles—the sort of things you buy at the Fifth Avenue junk shops in New York for two or three hundred per, when the market's up, and sell for twenty-five cents the umbrellaful when the bottom's fallen out of everything because one of those multi-millionaires wants a few hundred dollars in real money to pay the rent with, and's squeezing Wall Street to see if he can get it.

Mungo read the Sultan's letter, and it sounded pretty good to me.

He wanted to know if I'd accept the dollars in payment for the sausages he'd taken from me, and the other things as a souvenir of my stay in Batu S'gumpal; and he'd take it as a personal favour if I'd let him send me out to the coast in the Royal Forty-oared Boat, and he'd send a man with me to make a deal about taking delivery of two thousand cases of sausages at market rates, and he hoped I'd live to be a thousand years old and then die of drink and opium-smoking, same as he hoped to.

I was clear about taking the money and the junk, but I thought I'd better ask Kulani about that trip in the Forty-oared Boat. But she said it was all right and that in two days we'd be at the mouth of the river—not the one I'd come up from Palmtown, but the one running west to the Straits.

Next day we started, and Kulani came along to keep me company. When we reached the coast we found a steamer anchored in the offing, and I went on board of her and took passage for Palmtown, being anxious to collect my two thousand from the Governor.



I was real sorry to leave Kulani, and when I said good-bye to her, it was all I could do to keep from kissing her—but I did.

"By-by, Stack," said she. "I thinking you very fine man. I too sorry you going. Any time you seeing Tabbi Week'm you tell him say: 'White man stand by Kulani, Kulani stand by white man, by Jove!'"

And I took her two hands in mine and said:

"Kulani, you're all right, and if it wasn't for the fact I'm promised to another woman, blame me if I wouldn't ask you to come along and hit the trail with me."

But she smiled and shook her head and got into her boat, and pretty soon the river bank hid her from me.

Well, sir, she was surely a corker, and, looking back, I can't seem to remember but one woman that ever made me feel the way she did.

But that was different, because, of course, when you come right down to it, Mamie Hosmer—oh, pshaw!

THE END

*ack*









**JUL 9 - 1956**

